

# Flu Facts

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## About the flu vaccine...

The flu vaccine provides the best protection against 3 strains of influenza virus. Because the flu virus changes over time, you need to get a flu shot every year.

### Flu vaccine is recommended for:

- All children 6 – 23 months of age
- Everyone 50 years of age and older
- Pregnant women
- Everyone 6 months of age and older with chronic medical conditions, such as heart disease, asthma, diabetes, weakened immune systems, etc.
- People who live in the same house or take care of anyone in one of the groups above.
- Anyone who wants to avoid getting the flu.

## There are 2 kinds of flu vaccine:

### The flu shot

The flu shot is made from killed vaccine.

The flu shot can be given to anyone 6 months of age or older.

### The nasal-spray flu vaccine

The vaccine that is sprayed into the nose is a weakened live vaccine.

Only *healthy* people who are 5 – 49 years of age should get the nasal spray flu vaccine.

## Simple steps you can take to protect yourself and your loved ones:

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water or use an alcohol based hand rub or gel frequently, especially after visiting public places or being in contact with anyone with a cold or the flu. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Cover your mouth when coughing or sneezing. Turn your head (never cough in the direction of someone else) and cough or sneeze into a tissue. If tissues are not available, cough or sneeze into the inside of your elbow.
- Do not take young children, those with immune system problems or the chronically ill into large crowds unnecessarily when the flu is in your community.
- Avoid close contact (holding, hugging and kissing) with anyone who has a cold or the flu. Be very careful with children, as they are most likely to become sick with the flu.
- Stay home from work or school and avoid public activities for at least 5 (7 for children) days if you have symptoms of the flu.
- Do not share items that can spread germs and viruses, like drinking cups, straws, or other items that you put in your mouth.
- Clean things that are touched often in household, classroom and child care settings: door or refrigerator handles, phones, water faucets etc.

# About the flu...

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## What is the flu?

The flu is a very contagious disease of the respiratory (breathing) system. The flu is easily passed from one person to another by coughing and sneezing. It is usually very unpleasant, but for most people symptoms generally get better after 7 –10 days.

The flu usually starts very **suddenly** with:

- fever (from 102° – 104°) lasting 3 – 4 days
- headache
- severe muscle aches
- general weakness/extreme fatigue

These symptoms are accompanied by:

- dry cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose

## What to do if you have the flu:

- Rest in bed
- Drink lots of fluids
- Take non-aspirin pain relievers such as acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (e.g. Advil®, Motrin®, etc.). Children and teens with the flu should never take aspirin as they may develop a rare, but serious disease called Reye syndrome
- Stay home and avoid public activities until your symptoms are resolved (usually 5-7 days)
- Talk with your health care provider if you are considering prescription drugs as they can have serious side effects in some people
- For extreme cases, visit your health care provider or the emergency department as soon as possible

Note: If you are at high risk for complications from the flu (see: *Who Should Get the Flu Shot?* on reverse side), you should consult your health care provider when your flu symptoms begin. Your doctor may recommend certain antiviral drugs to treat the flu.

## When should you see a health care provider?

You should see a health care provider or go to an emergency room immediately if you have any of the symptoms below:

- Severe or prolonged flu symptoms
- Rapid or labored breathing, or bluish skin
- Pain or difficulty breathing
- Cough with yellow sputum or phlegm
- Becoming sick again with fever and/or a worse cough after flu symptoms have improved
- Not drinking enough fluids

Parents should seek medical attention for infants and children that are:

- Not waking up; not interacting with others
- So irritable they do not want to be held

For more information about influenza visit, <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/> or <http://www.state.ma.us/dph/> or call the Massachusetts Immunization Program at 617-983-6800 or 888-658-2850.

To listen to a recorded message about influenza please call the Public Health Information Hotline of the Division of Epidemiology and Immunization at 866-627-7968.